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Adoption of the report of the Committee on its fifty-seventh session

Draft report

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Addendum

Programme questions: evaluation
(*Item 3 (b)*)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the evaluation of the Department of Political Affairs

1. At its 7th meeting, on 7 June 2017, the Committee considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the Department of Political Affairs (E/AC.51/2017/6 and Corr.1).

2. The Assistant Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services introduced the report and, together with representatives of OIOS and the Department of Political Affairs, responded to questions raised during its consideration by the Committee.

Discussion

3. Delegations expressed appreciation for the evaluation report, with several citing its quality and insightfulness, particularly in the light of the challenges of evaluating the highly qualitative nature of the work of the Department. Delegations conveyed support for the recommendations, explicitly citing recommendations 1 and 3. A delegation encouraged the Department to implement the recommendations within existing resources. A delegation enquired as to the periodicity of evaluations and the reasons that the Department had not been evaluated since 2008, taking into account that, on the basis of the risk assessment that the Inspection and Evaluation Division had undertaken, the Department was at the top of the list (see E/AC.51/2017/6, para. 1).

4. Delegations also expressed appreciation for the work of the Department, particularly its good offices, and for its mediation and conflict prevention work in the field. Furthermore, delegations emphasized the importance of the Department's

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mandate and its role in advising the Secretary-General in his own good offices work, for example, in the area of human rights. A delegation enquired whether the efficiency and the effectiveness of the support provided by the Department was recognized, bearing in mind the complexity of analysing its accountability procedures. A delegation observed that the Department faced structural difficulties in carrying out its functions, and welcomed the upcoming initiatives of the Secretary-General in addressing those issues, including co-location within the Secretariat and fostering a shift in mentality.

5. Clarification was requested of the Department regarding the reasons behind the increased number of conflicts around the world since 1990, and the potential links with the work of the Department (see E/AC.51/2017/6, para. 8). A delegation queried the Department on the drivers behind the increasing number of special political missions during the period under evaluation (see E/AC.51/2017/6, para. 11). In that regard, the focus of the report on those missions was questioned. One delegation enquired as to the degree of engagement between those missions and national authorities, and also enquired as to how the performance of such missions was appraised. In the context of non-mission support provided by the Department in the past, a delegation enquired as to the reference in paragraph 25 of the report to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as an anecdotal case of a country that had benefited from the support of the Department.

6. Updates were sought on the specific measures that the Department had been taking, or intended to take, to address the weaknesses highlighted in the report. Areas on which clarification was sought included: analytical gaps; the lack of early warning analyses and exit strategies; proposals by the Secretary-General to improve the peace and security architecture, including recommendations from the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations; insufficient measures for ensuring field-level accountability (see E/AC.51/2017/6, paras. 51 and 52); harnessing knowledge to improve performance; and the lack of gender parity, particularly among mediators. With regard to the Department's analytical gaps, questions were raised regarding the sharing of political analysis with other departments and with the Security Council. In reference to paragraph 37 of the report, a delegation enquired whether the establishment of the analysis and strategic planning unit in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General would help address analytical gaps, including in the areas of early warning and conflict prevention. Reiterating the importance of accountability and oversight of work performed in the field, concerns were raised regarding one of the report's findings concerning the lack of compacts among some categories of senior mission leadership, and calls were made for the improvement of accountability systems in the future. A delegation enquired as to the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in high-level posts and the remedial actions taken to correct the issue. In that regard, the Department was encouraged to strengthen its efforts to achieve greater gender parity.

7. Specific concerns were voiced regarding the Department's partnerships, specifically the potential duplication between the Department and other United Nations entities in providing specific areas of support, including in some areas which were considered as falling outside the Department's expertise (for example, with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the area of human rights, as referenced in paragraph 24 of the report, or with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations with regard to peacekeeping operations). A delegation raised the issue of standby teams and associated shortcomings and actions that the Department planned to take to address the issue, including linking them to the upcoming proposals of the Secretary-General on peace and security. A delegation sought further information on the extent to which the Department had partnered with regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union, in the context of

providing support to non-mission settings (see E/AC.51/2017/6, para. 32). Concerning paragraph 6 (d) of the report, a delegation requested clarification on the role of the Department in the election-related assistance that would be provided to Member States.

8. A delegation raised concerns regarding the root causes of the different ratings by stakeholder groups of the Department's effectiveness (Headquarters versus field staff versus Peace and Development Advisers), as presented in figure V of the report. Furthermore, noting the information contained in paragraph 31 of the report and the different tiers of criticality for countries in conflict supported by the Department, a delegation raised concerns regarding the criteria the Department employed in deciding which conflict settings to support, and whether and why some high-criticality settings were not supported, while other lower-criticality settings were.

9. A delegation enquired about the possibility that the Committee could provide recommendations to Member States in order to address deficiencies in intergovernmental decision-making processes as highlighted in the report, which created challenges for the Department, citing, for example, Security Council mandates, which, as the report indicated, rarely changed. A delegation offered the view that the Committee should not offer recommendations to Member States, which would go beyond its remit.

10. One delegation raised concerns regarding the frequency with which OIOS intended to evaluate the Department in the future, pointing out that it had rated the Department as high-risk in the risk assessment it had presented to the Committee at its informal meeting on 5 June 2017. A delegation raised questions regarding the extent to which OIOS had consulted with host Governments during the inception phase of the evaluation, especially considering the evaluation's focus, and expressed interest in increased collaboration with the evaluation team before and during the evaluation. A delegation underlined that case studies, a survey and a documentation review had been undertaken in order to perform the analysis of the Department. In reference to figure III, the delegation underlined that 1.2 billion dollars represented 23 per cent of the Organization's regular budget for political affairs, and sought further information on the inclusion of that Department's budget performance in future performance evaluations. A delegation noted the absence of an evaluation for the biennium 2014-2015 and enquired as to the reasons.

11. A delegation sought clarification regarding paragraph 45 of the report, concerning, notably, the fact that the Department was not structured to produce independent evaluations of performance either at the Headquarters or at the field level and that there was as yet no dedicated evaluation office, thus setting it apart from most other Secretariat entities.

Conclusions and recommendations

12. **The Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse recommendations 1, 2 and 3 contained in paragraph 59 of the report of OIOS on the evaluation of the Department of Political Affairs.**

13. **The Committee recommended that the General Assembly take note of recommendation 4 contained in paragraph 59 of the report of OIOS on the evaluation of the Department of Political Affairs.**

14. **The Committee recalled the importance of holding the most senior staff of the Department of Political Affairs accountable, and noted that the Inspection and Evaluation Division had first highlighted the issue in its 2006-2008 evaluation.**